

MEMORIAL
OF
THE DELEGATES
FROM THE
COMMERCIAL AND AGRICULTURAL SECTIONS
OF
THE STATE OF MAINE.

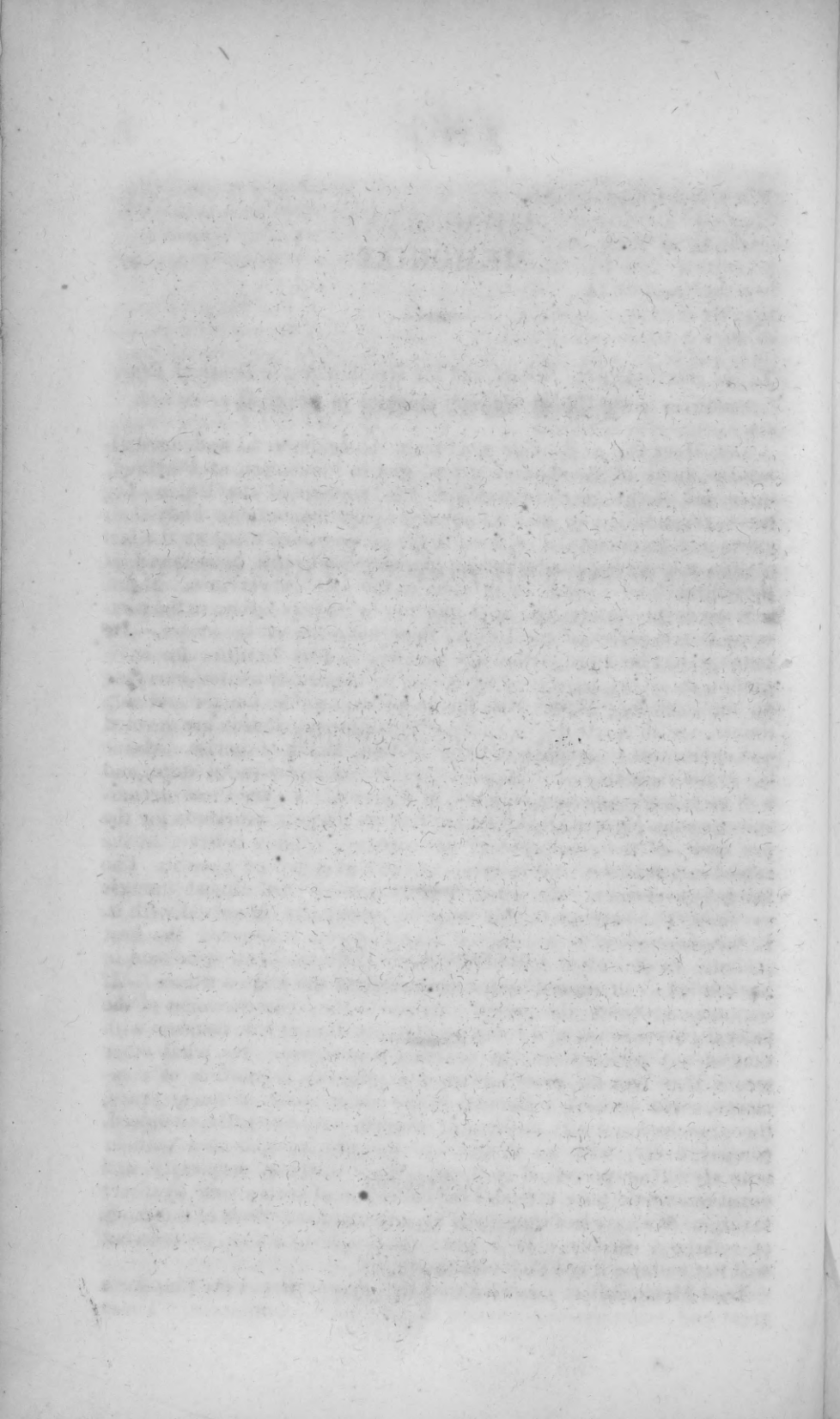
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1820.



MEMORIAL.

To the Honourable the Senate and the Honourable the House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled.

The Memorial of the delegates from the commercial and agricultural sections of the state of Maine, met in convention at Portland, in behalf of the great interests of this portion of the Union, beg leave, respectfully, to make known to your honourable body their views and sentiments in relation to the propositions made at the last session of Congress, and which, it is understood, will be renewed at the approaching session, in relation to the national revenue. Maine is more deeply interested, in proportion to its population, in the commercial prosperity of the Union, than any other of the states.—Its tonnage has been proportionally greater, and its facilities for navigation, its rivers, bays, and harbours, its opportunities for carrying on the fisheries, its immense forests of exportable lumber and ship timber, are unequalled.—A vast portion of the population are devoted and habituated to commerce, to navigation, and the fisheries. Maine is, at the same time, calculated to become an agricultural state, and will be the first grazing country in America. Under these circumstances your Memorialists can but feel the deepest solicitude for the prosperity of the commerce of the country. They believe, at the same time, that the vital interests of the Union depend upon it. The federal government was ushered into existence with almost a single eye to it. The revenue is, and must be, essentially connected with it. It has heretofore been believed that experience afforded the best school. In politics it has been preeminently so:—can it be said to have failed us in regard to the commerce of the United States?—If we turn our eye to the period anterior to the commencement of the federal government, and compare the situation of this country with that of any period since, the contrast is immense. By what other means than impost, growing out of a judicious regulation of commerce, could we have collected, in the short space of thirty years, three hundred and fifty millions of revenue, with but little, or indeed, comparatively, with no distress to the people, and in a manner scarcely felt or perceived by them. What distress, perplexity, and vexation, would have attended the collection of such a sum by direct taxation? We have had some little experience of the effects of this mode of raising a revenue. It is what the people in a free government will not endure, if not unavoidable.

Your Memorialists conceive that the present is not the time for a great and embarrassing change in relation to commerce. Those

connected with it have, for years, been struggling against a series of untoward events, such as it could hardly be believed could be withstood. The restrictive system fell upon them with great force. The war succeeded, and very nearly accomplished that portion of their ruin, which had not before been effected. At the conclusion of peace, crippled as they were, their only alternative was to attempt to regain their hold upon commerce in competition with a state of things as novel as it was embarrassing. They found all the world, also, at peace; and ready and determined, in a commercial warfare, to dispute every inch of ground. In this contest the commercial men of this country have been ever since engaged. It is impossible that the wisdom of Congress should not have discerned the arduousness of this struggle. And it will not escape observation, at the same time, that, in the five years in which it has progressed, more than one hundred millions of dollars of revenue have been derived from commerce alone. Your memorialists are fully aware that the community generally has felt the effects of the distress and embarrassment to which the mercantile class have been subjected. Whatever affects commerce will affect the community. But the disease is necessarily the most acute and raging, in the part where it first commences. Other parts of the system will, however, ultimately feel it in a greater or less degree. Commerce is the great pillar in the temple of national prosperity. That being demolished the superstructure will follow.

Even the present rate of duties upon importation is embarrassing to commerce, and injurious to the revenue. It was the result of a state of things which had been induced by the restrictive system and the war. During that period manufactures had experienced a premature and unnatural growth. At the conclusion of the war the government were compelled to protect them by the imposition of duties, well known at the time to be injurious to the revenue, and adding to the already appalling prospects of the merchant. The duties, in many instances, were so great as to amount to an exclusion of the article. This was the case particularly with coarse India cottons, an article of which the poorer classes made great use; and the imposition is, in effect, a tax upon them for the benefit of the manufacturer of coarse cottons. The tax or duty on these articles amounts to an average of one hundred per cent, thereby doubling the price of the article to the poor, to enable the manufacturer here to sell at a similar rate. There are duties imposed on other articles, to an exorbitant amount, which have tended to depress commerce, the revenue, and the agriculture of the country. An enormous duty has been imposed upon spirits of all kinds, and upon wines, under the idea that they were luxuries, and, with a vain hope, as is believed, of discouraging intemperance. Under the idea of their being luxuries they should be taxed to the utmost they would bear without discouraging importation. But the idea of taxing, and thereby checking the disposition to intemperance will always prove fallacious, so long as we allow

ardent spirits to be manufactured among ourselves without any check whatever. If the duties on the rum of the West-Indies, the brandy of France, and the wines of Portugal and Spain and the Islands appartenant had been predicated upon the single principle of raising a revenue, a vast commerce would have been open to the people of this country, which the exorbitant duty now imposed has, in a manner, cut up by the roots. Formerly, when the duties were less, the grain which is now manufactured into whiskey was exported to those countries, and for it the farmer then availed himself of a great price in cash or in the necessaries of life. Now he converts it into whiskey; too great a portion of which he himself is tempted to consume, to the destruction of his health and the ruin of his morals; and thus the benevolent intentions of the Legislature have been wholly frustrated; and a regulation which they intended as a blessing has proved a curse. It has now got to be fashionable in some parts of the Union to say that the production of whiskey must be encouraged; and for that purpose, that all other ardent spirits must be excluded, in order that agriculture may be promoted! How much better it would be to remove from the farmer all temptation to the consumption of ardent spirit; and to furnish him with a better, as well as a more salutary vent for his grain? Your memorialists have not been led to these remarks by any thing like hostility to the manufacturing interests. They are, on the contrary, decidedly in favor of all reasonable encouragement to promote, uphold, and cherish every thing of that kind. But your memorialists had never dreamt it would ever be considered necessary or proper that all other interests should be made to yield as secondary and tributary to that alone. They are sure this was not the original design of the framers of the constitution. In that instrument we find nothing about manufactures. They, however, have pressed into their service an elaborate essay of the celebrated Alexander Hamilton on this subject. They have adopted his principles, but disregard their application. He insisted on the encouragement of manufactures so far as might be consistent with a due regard to commerce and the collection of revenue. The duties now are nearly treble what they were when he wrote; and, on an average, higher by one hundred per cent. than he, in the height of his zeal for manufactures, ever recommended. In the case of iron, the duty on which was not half what it now is, he recommended a diminution, under an idea that it was, almost a raw material, necessary in every kind of mechanism: and the same with regard to molasses, which we could, ourselves distil. At the time he wrote, it was necessary to urge, with great vehemence, upon the attention of Congress, this subject of encouraging manufactures; in order to have it attended to so far as might be compatible with the other great interests of the community. But he could not have foreseen this abuse and perversion of his reasoning. He never could have imagined that the time would come when it would be deemed good policy to make the people pay from thirty to one hundred

per cent. more for goods to the manufacturer than they might otherwise be bought for of the importing merchant.

Your memorialists believe the duty now imposed on foreign manufactures to be fully adequate to any reasonable demand on the part of the American manufacturer. All the cotton and woollen manufactories, which have been providently established, and well managed, are perfectly satisfied with the present rate of duties. From these we hear no complaint: and they are considerably numerous in the northern and eastern states. All such as were established without judgment, without capital, and without the aid of any skill whatever, have, of course, mouldered into ruin. Such, it cannot comport with the wisdom or policy of government to attempt to revive and uphold. Your memorialists believe that the excitement in favor of manufacturers has had its origin rather in the improvidence and rash enterprise of some of our fellow citizens, than in any well grounded cause of complaint. It may be, that between 1812 and 1815, a state of things existed which induced individuals, in great numbers even, to plunge inconsiderately into extravagant and wild schemes in relation to manufactures. But it does not follow that the government is, at all hazards, bound to uphold, protect, and save them from ruin. Every step which the government might take, under such a supposed obligation, would but increase the evil, and create still new obligations predicated upon a similar unfortunate state of things. The final result would be a state and condition like that of Great Britain. There, unfortunately, such solicitations, in times past, have been yielded to; and the nation now stands committed, at whatever costs, to stand by and uphold establishments which it would now gladly shake off. A glaring instance of the folly and stupidity of such engagements was but lately witnessed in that country. The merchants there petitioned for a greater freedom of trade, and complained, among other things, of being obliged to import timber from North America; stating that it could be imported from Norway at half the cost that it could from America. The ship owners who were engaged in the importation from America, preferred a counter petition, stating that, since the government had confined the importations of timber from America, they had been at immense expense in preparing ships to bring the vast quantities from America necessary for the supply of the kingdom; that, if the trade from Norway in that article should be opened, no timber could be imported from America; and that one half of their ships and equipments must be laid aside, as the other half would be adequate to bring the requisite amount from Norway, it being practicable to make two voyages to Norway in the time that would be requisite to perform one to America. Thus it appeared that a vast quantity of shipping, and sailors in proportion, must be thrown out of employment and ruined, if the British government should not continue to compel its subjects to buy timber at twice what it would cost elsewhere. And this is the case with an infinity of other establishments in that country. By the improvident interference of government, establishments have been reared up and fostered, which they

must uphold at every hazard, the faith of government having been virtually pledged so to do. There is not a circumstance more alarming to your memorialists than that the manufacturers in this country are continually holding up the conduct of the British government, in this particular, as affording the perfect model for our imitation. They are delighted with British exclusions, premiums, drawbacks, high and prohibitory duties, and the whole train of extravagant schemes to retain the power of manufacturing exclusively for themselves, and if possible for the world besides. The situation of this country is in no wise similar to that of Great Britain. We have no surplus population that cannot be retained but by such means. We have vacant territory without limit and almost without price, inviting cultivation. There they must manufacture or emigrate. And, notwithstanding the utmost of their exertion to find employment for their laboring poor, every seventh individual is a pauper, and dependant on charity. In this country, as yet, it is not even every hundredth individual that is a subject of charity, and many centuries may elapse before the proportion will be greater, if this manufacturing mania can be kept within bounds.

Your memorialists lament those strides on the part of manufacturers for another and more important reason. Steadiness in governmental regulations affecting the industry of the people is highly essential. There is at present a perfect acquiescence in all parts of the Union, in relation to what has been done to favor manufactures; although it bears hard upon the revenue and upon commerce. The effect of an extraordinary action is to produce reaction. If the manufacturers should now succeed the consequence will be a deficit in the revenue. A direct tax must ensue; irritation will be produced; and, by the time the manufacturers shall have got their great establishments in operation, a new tariff will be enacted with a view to revenue solely. When the tariff was settled, in 1816, the manufacturers were duly represented. The then Secretary of the Treasury was from the city of Philadelphia, and partook, it is believed, of all the feelings of the people there upon this subject. At any rate he recommended the tariff, at that time, with an express view to manufactures; and his recommendations, so far as it affected manufactures, in every instance, it is understood, except in relation to iron, were implicitly adopted. At that time the manufacturers, excepting those of iron, were perfectly satisfied; and in 1818, at the instance of the manufacturers, the duty on iron was increased from nine to fifteen dollars per ton. They at the same time requested that the duty of 25 per cent. on cotton and woollen goods, which had been limited to five years, might be made perpetual. In this, also, they were gratified. Your memorialists expected to have heard no more from the manufacturers about further protecting duties.

But the stride they now contemplate is, to your memorialists, truly astonishing. Nothing now will satisfy them short of twenty-five dollars per ton upon iron, an article necessary in every piece of mechanism: thirty-five per cent. upon printed books, by way, it may

be presumed, of discouraging science; ten cents per gallon on molasses, to protect the distillers of whiskey; thirty-three and a third per cent. upon cotton and woollen goods, and so upon other manufactured articles in proportion: and, to crown all, cash payment, without credit, for duties!

Should the wisdom of your honorable body deem it expedient and proper to yield to solicitations so unreasonable, the commerce of the country must be considered as at an end, and all concerned in it as devoted to inevitable ruin. The long-established habits of the country must be subverted; and a shock will be felt in the community such as will arouse from their slumbers the mass of the people; and awaken them in time, but, perhaps, too late, to a sense of their true interests.

Your memorialists have thus, with the characteristic frankness of fellow citizens, intimated some of their views and feelings on this all-important subject. Their destinies are in the power of the national government, on whose wisdom and justice they trust they can rely. It is for Congress to determine whether the great interests of the nation, on which depend its power, its glory, and its resources, shall be sacrificed to the cupidity of a handful of improvident and speculating manufacturers.

Signed by order and in behalf of the convention.

ARTHUR M'LELLAN.

HENRY CLARKE, *Secretary.*

Portland, October 19, 1820.